

Nina MALIOVANA

**ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN INTERCULTURAL
BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

The article examines various definitions of the concept of 'lingua franca'; it underlines the need for a professionalization of the use of English as a lingua franca in a business context as well; it gives the possible characteristics of English as a Lingua Franca in general; it claims that English has become the lingua franca of the business community today; it shows the relationship between the global business environment and three core areas where English as a lingua franca are likely to be the shared communication medium between the interlocutors.

Ключові слова: *globalization, intercultural business communication, lingua franca, professionalism.*

Постановка проблеми. The globalization of business and communication that we have been witnessing over the past decades has given rise to the use of English as a lingua franca in intercultural business communication to an unprecedented extent. A lingua franca can be defined as any language that serves as a basic tool of communication between speakers of different languages; the very fact that the definition includes the word 'basic' gives us a clue to the way in which a lingua franca is often found, as a trade language or a pidgin language that includes basic terminology for use in specific contexts, but which often lacks the complexity and multifaceted variation that denotes a 'real' language.

Previous research. Professor Anna Mauranen [4, p. 9] offers a more specific definition of the concept of a lingua franca: In her terms, a lingua franca is:

- A contact language where speakers do not share a first language
- Always a foreign language to some of its speakers
- A type of contact that requires:
 1. Knowledge of languages, culture, business environment, communication
 2. Skills
 3. Personal and interpersonal competencies

Yet, in order for modern, intercultural business communication to function appropriately and for professional communicators it is necessary to rise above the traditional lingua franca definition and use English in a much more controlled and conscious way, if the communication is to be successful. Still, this is to a very large extent dependent on who our interlocutors are – whether they are speakers of English as their L2 or perhaps native speakers of English.

Professor Larry Selinker [5, p. 53–62] introduces the term "interlanguage", which he defines as "an emerging linguistic system that has been developed by a learner of a second language (or L2) who has not become fully proficient yet but is approximating target language: preserving some features of their first language (or L1), or overgeneralizing target language rules in speaking or writing the target language and creating innovations. An interlanguage is idiosyncratically based on the

learners' experiences with the L2. It can fossilize in any of its developmental stages. The interlanguage rules are shaped by: LI transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning (e.g. simplification), strategies of L2 communication (or communication strategies like circumlocution), and overgeneralization of the target language patterns". Selinker's definition of interlanguage is closely linked to the points made in the chapter "The Adult Professional ESL Learner", and thus it gives us a clue to what it takes to bring a speaker of e.g. English as their L2 up to professional standards: this would require the abandonment of transfer from the LI, of simplification strategies and of overgeneralization that often characterize the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF).

Dutch researcher Juliane House introduces an interesting distinction that plays well into this discussion, the distinction between languages for communication and languages for identification, and in this distinction we find some of the roots of the potential misunderstandings that may arise in the use of e.g. English as a lingua franca. House [3, p. 559–560] says that "ELF can be regarded as a language for communication, that is, a useful instrument for making oneself understood in international encounters. It is instrumental in enabling communication with others who do not speak one's own LI. In ELF use, speakers must continuously work out a joint basis for their interactions, locally constructing and intersubjectively ratifying meaning. In using ELF, speakers are unlikely to conceive of it as a language for identification': it is local languages, and particularly an individual's LI(s), which are likely to be the main determinants of identity, which means holding a stake in the collective linguistic-cultural capital that defines the LI group and its members".

Here House suggests that ELF is used for purely communicative purposes and that the identity of the speaker lies in his/her LI rather than in the ELF used, however professional the ELF may be. In order, then, to truly get to know our interlocutor(s) in a business context, we would need to look into the cultural characteristics and traditions embedded in the LI(s) they use, and therefore knowledge of the cultural dimension is an important building block in the construction of professional oral communicative competence.

The aim of this paper is to look at the problem of English as a lingua franca from a wider social perspective, and focusing on the key components of the theory of the language, identify conditions for intercultural business communication itself.

Analysis and discussion. English as a lingua franca can be said to have a vehicular function in that it serves as a means by which thoughts are (relatively easily) expressed or made known to others, it serves as a medium of exchange of opinions and it serves as a means of conveyance or transmission. In addition, it facilitates international exchange and promotes understanding; it allows greater mobility e.g. when people travel in search of employment. It has also been argued that it renders interpreters, translators and costly equipment unnecessary; however, for this last argument to hold true, it would require that all users of English as a

lingua franca (ELF) in a given communication situation have moved beyond the interlanguage stage and towards professionalism.

It is also being claimed that English has become the lingua franca of the business community today because it is easier to learn than other languages (another debatable point), because it has gained dominance through popular culture, because of British and particularly American economic and political power and because the language holds positive connotations of democracy. Other reasons for the 'choice' of English as a business lingua franca are that English is in contact with practically every other language in the world; English has far more non-native speakers than native speakers (approx. 4:1); all these factors add up to the interesting notion that in fact the future of Global English is in the hands of non-native speakers!

This, in turn, clearly underlines the need for a professionalization of the use of English as a lingua franca in a business context, since the advanced state of the business community requires knowledge-sharing and communication at a very high level.

Since ELF is a contact language which is never the LI of all participants, and since – as House puts it – users ratify or negotiate meaning when using ELF, it requires a high degree of cooperativeness between the participants in the discourse where feedback indicating understanding is crucial for the success of the communication. In addition, the use of ELF requires a high level of explicitness, which has the benefit that it reduces the amount of misunderstandings that could arise in the process. Since in ELF interaction, focus between the participants is on negotiation of meaning and collaboration, this allows for a higher degree of linguistic and cultural mix than would be seen in LI interaction; it could thus be argued that the use of ELF may in fact enrich the vocabulary of the users in general. Another interesting dimension is that in the process of negotiation of meaning, approximate items of speech will be understood, if the speaker gives a sufficient hint of what the target item may be and if the context supplies enough backup for the listener to make sense of the utterance. All this plays very well into House's definition of ELF as a language for communication.

However, if we stop there, the communication may still fail unless there is a sufficient amount of goodwill on the part of all participants in the communication situation, since we have not addressed the dimension of identification where we find the cultural characteristics and embedded traditions of our interlocutor(s); this means that in order for us to be successful in our professional use of ELF, we cannot avoid taking into consideration the dimensions of face and politeness, which vary greatly around the world.

As previously mentioned, the globalization of business necessitates timely precise and professional communication with a wide variety of audiences' The below figure (Figure 1) illustrates the relationship between the global business environment and three core areas where English as a lingua franca are likely to be the shared communication medium between the interlocutors. The figure at the same time illustrates the comprehensive demands that are put on the professional users

of ELF: First of all, they will have to have very high command of English in terms of both the LSP (language for special purposes) of the respective organization and of the more every-day nuances of the language in order to be able to use ELF as the corporate language, secondly they are required to be able to make themselves understood by a wide variety of audiences both inside and outside the organization which means that they need to be in conscious control of their vocabulary to such an extent that they are able to select the very terminology and level of formality that will suit the particular audience they are addressing at any given point in time, and last but not least they are required to have a formalised insight into how knowledge is structured and managed in the knowledge society, just as they are required to command the vocabulary that transmits that type of knowledge. So being a professional language user is by no means a small and trivial matter!

English as a Lingua Franca in Intercultural Business Communication

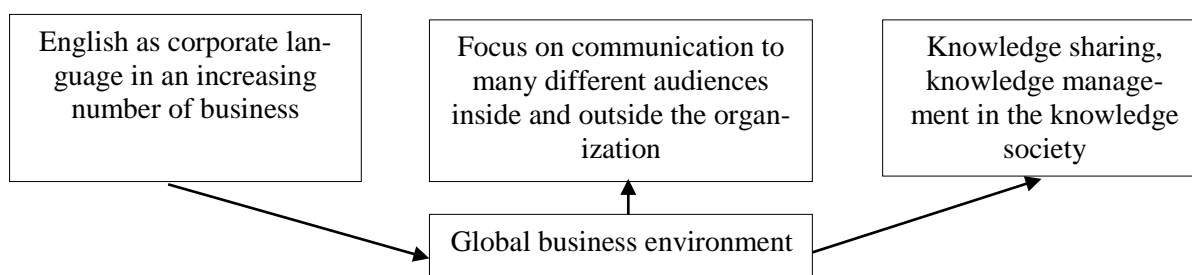


Figure 1: The use of English in the global business environment (by Brian Bloch & Donna Starks: 1995)

Two researchers from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, Brian Bloch and Donna Starks, [2, p. 81] have been studying ELF in a business context and looked into the implications of intra-language variation for international business. In this connection, they designed a taxonomy of English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries organised as a system of circles within each other:

The inner circle consists of those countries where English is traditionally spoken as the LI: The USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and to some extent South Africa [2, p. 81].

The outer circle consists of those countries where English is used as an official or semi-official language, often due to a colonial past; many African countries fall into this category along with Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan and the Philippines. In these countries, English is often used for educational, social, political and administrative purposes.

The dual circle is a kind of 'buffer zone' between the inner/outer circle countries where English is the LI or almost the LI and the expanding/Business English circles, where English is not the LI but serves as a medium of communication, a lingua franca. The dual circle encompasses countries where speakers have more contact and greater opportunities to use English than most countries in the Expanding Circle but where English is not an official language [2, p. 82] – a typical example would be the EU member countries.

The expanding circle consists of countries like e.g. Japan, China, Korea etc. that do not have a colonial past, but where the number of users of English as an international language is rapidly expanding and will continue to, do so for the years ahead.

The Business English circle forms the 'outer layer' and consists of those countries/speakers that use English as an international language or ELF. "This is the sort of common English that a Norwegian would use when conversing with an Italian. It is, therefore, a lingua-franca for non-native English speakers and represents their only possible means of communication. It provides yet another type of English" [2, p. 82].

What is interesting about this taxonomy is that it clearly demonstrates the wide varieties of English that the professional user may come across in an international business context: From the native speaker of English to the speaker whose competence is restricted to the LSP of his/her profession. This places high demands on the professional user's capacity to process spoken language, and it places equally high demands on his/her capacity to produce spoken language at a level that matches the interlocutor.

Actually, it makes the following question highly relevant in a business context: What does it mean, then, when a business organization decides to make English the corporate language? How does management intend to implement this decision into a language policy – how are employees supposed to distinguish between situations where the use of the company language is required and situations where it is permissible to speak the local language? And how does the introduction of a company language and a language policy affect internal communication as such – will it lead to increased knowledge sharing within the organization, or will knowledge that only exists in the local language be lost?

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the implications of management decisions to introduce a certain language, in most cases English, as the company or corporate language. Sometimes the decision to introduce English as the corporate language is not even a conscious one – it just happens that English becomes the working language and over time it also becomes the official language. Beamer & Varner [1, p. 60] discuss the benefits and drawbacks of selecting one particular language (English) as the corporate language and point to i.a. the need for education of staff and management alike to be able to fully embrace the dimensions of the corporate language. In addition, they point to the underlying cultural differences and the differences in the communicative competence that professional users are likely to come across. "Even if both sides speak English, they still face hurdles. For example, do they speak the same English, or does the Polish firm speak British English while the Japanese firm speaks American English?"

Another interesting point to consider is the employees' background – is the company a high-tech company with research employees who master English through their professional work or is it a low-tech industry employing mainly blue collar workers whose English is very limited? Furthermore, the English the Polish managers speak will have some Polish characteristics, and the English the Japa-

nese managers speak will have some Japanese characteristics. Typically, the cultural references, thought and language patterns of each side, will influence their communication in English. They may have different preferences for organizing material and providing detail” [1, p. 62].

Conclusion. With the massive increase in global digital communication and the easy ways of travelling for both business and pleasure purposes, we can assume that the high degree of mobility among users of English will lead to faster language change and that we may expect a dramatically accelerated change in the years ahead. This means that linguists will take an interest in the de-scription of both the changes and the resulting language from a scientific perspective, and this will open up a whole new area of study, which will be useable for the business community in their efforts to continuously develop and upgrade the professional competences of their staff.

There is no reason to expect that the use of English as a business lingua franca will develop to a lesser extent: In the 21st century, English is truly the international medium of professional communication, and as can be seen from the above reflections on the spread of English from being primarily the Lt of a number of countries to being the international business language, universities, businesses and individuals alike have to address the demand for having English or ELF as part of their educational, corporate or individual ‘package’ of competences in a professional manner.

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Summary

Мальована Ніна. *Англійська мова як лінгва франка в міжкультурному бізнес спілкуванні.*

У статті розглядаються різні визначення поняття “lingua franca”; підкреслюється необхідність професіоналізації використання англійської мови як lingua franca в бізнес-контексті; це дає можливі характеристики англійської як Lingua Franca в цілому; стверджується, що англійська стала сьогодні lingua franca ділової спільноти; це показує взаємозв’язок між глобальним бізнес-середовищем та трьома основними напрямками, де англійська як lingua franca, ймовірно, є спільним комунікаційним середовищем між співрозмовниками.

Ключові слова: глобалізація, міжкультурна бізнес комунікація, лінгва франка, професіоналізм.